



MICHAEL HENDY

16 April 1942–13 May 2008

Chaque homme est avant tout une histoire vécue d'une manière unique dans la plus totale subjectivité, que personne ne peut raconter de la même manière

E. Zarifian, *Le goût de vivre*

DEATH STRUCK Michael Hendy at his home in Walmer, Deal (Kent) on May 13, 2008, less than a month after his sixty-sixth birthday. His demise was as untimely as his scientific achievements were precocious.

Michael Hendy was born in Newhaven (Sussex), the eldest of three sons. As his father served in the Merchant Navy, it was left to his mother Vera to raise him and from his early years she favored his interest “in all strange things,” that is, snakes and mice, fossils and coins.¹ As is often the case with numismatists, early passion for collecting developed in him keen powers of observation. It was left to his tutor at The Queen’s College, Oxford, John Prestwich, to stretch his interests and introduce him to the complexities of the Byzantine world, understood in its broadest definition from the founding Tetrarchic and Constantinian reorganization to the fall of Constantinople.² As an undergraduate at Queen’s (1961–64), he once visited Cambridge to look at Byzantine coins in the Fitzwilliam Museum, and expressed such an unusual interest in those minted by the Comnenian and Palaeologan emperors that Philip Grierson (1910–2006) kept in touch with him, even inviting him to a feast at Caius College, a privilege generally reserved for very distinguished academics.

More importantly, Grierson also recommended him for a junior fellowship at Dumbarton Oaks (1965–67), following the seven months (1964/65) he had spent as a British Council graduate exchange scholar at the Uni-

versity of Sofia, devoting himself to study of Comnenian and later Byzantine coin hoards in the Bulgarian capital and in various provincial museums. This stay in Bulgaria was the starting point for his major discovery on the monetary history of the period. During his two years at Dumbarton Oaks, not only did he classify and label the institution’s holdings in this area, “the mare’s nest that the twelfth- and thirteenth-century coinages then formed,”³ with which no one then wished to be involved, but above all he wrote and completed the large volume *Coinage and Money in the Byzantine Empire, 1081–1261*, published by Dumbarton Oaks in 1969, when he was only twenty-seven. This first opus was both a *coup d’essai* and a *coup de maître*, in Corneille’s words.⁴

This revolutionary study brought order to the previously misunderstood coinage of this period.⁵ Where the then-classical reference work, Warwick Wroth’s *Catalogue of the Imperial Byzantine Coins in the British Museum* (London, 1908), described a chaotic series of debased coins of varying intrinsic value, Michael Hendy identified a decisive monetary reform that replaced the debased issues of the late eleventh century with a new system of denominations, at the top of which an almost pure gold coin, the *nomisma hyperpyron*, restored the prestige of the *bezant*, thus ending the monetary crisis of the late eleventh century.

He was also able to solve the mystery of the elusive coinage of the Latin Empire of Constantinople

1 Meg Alexiou and John Hendy, obituary at <http://caialumni.admn.cai.cam.ac.uk/alumni/obits/index.php>. I gratefully acknowledge information, assistance and editing provided by Professor Meg Alexiou and Dr. Nancy Patterson Ševčenko.

2 As adopted and argued for in his *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy, c. 300–1450* (Cambridge, 1985), 17–18.

3 M. F. Hendy, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection* (Washington, DC, 1999), 4.1:ix.

4 Pierre Corneille, *Le Cid* (1660), 2.2.410.

5 For a detailed contemporary assessment of this achievement, see C. Morrisson’s review in *Numismatic Chronicle*, 7th ser., 11 (1971): 356–66.

(1204–61): it was well known from Nicetas Choniates that the Crusaders had torn down several monumental statues of the capital and thrown them into the smelting furnaces to be melted down and struck into “staters” and “worthless small change.”⁶ French nineteenth-century numismatists like Sabatier and Schlumberger had tried to identify these issues in certain types of anonymous folles that A. R. Bellinger and Margaret Thompson subsequently demonstrated, on account of their overstrikes, to belong in fact to the eleventh-century series. Relying on his study of Bulgarian and other coin finds, Hendy identified and dated to the early thirteenth century a large and varied group of small bronze pieces that imitated, more or less faithfully, twelfth-century Byzantine types and that had been previously confused with Comnenian issues. He attributed the direct imitative series in large module (later called “faithful copies” by the Greek scholars) to the Bulgarian emperors (ca. 1195–ca. 1215?) and the various derivative types in several modules to the Latin rulers in Thessalonike and Constantinople. The evidence adduced was compelling and the basic proposals of redating were almost universally accepted, leading to a fruitful series of publications or re-publications of regional studies by Balkan numismatists in the light of his discoveries. But the “Bulgarian” attribution provoked, notably with Greek scholars, a long-lasting debate that was not exempt from what he called the emergence of an “ethnic note.”⁷ Out of the highly complex body of subsequent studies, it now appears, according to the latest in-depth examination by Pagona Papadopoulou, that the “Bulgarian” thesis needs qualification and that several authorities must have been responsible for the series.⁸ The question is still not completely solved, but Michael Hendy undoubtedly opened a wide field. Thanks to his penetrating analysis, it is now clear that the Latins were led into issuing these imitations by the sheer demand of a thriving Byzantine economy, where growing trade

and accelerated exchanges necessitated the full array of an articulated coinage.

It was another merit of Michael Hendy’s early research to recognize that the twelfth century was not a period of decline for Byzantium, as generally assumed in the 1960s, when current scholarship asserted that the Turkish seizure of part of Asia Minor, the chrysobull issued to Venice in 1082, and the various privileges granted later to the Italians had doomed the empire’s economic situation. In 1970, in a brilliant paper read at the Royal Historical Society in London, he offered a pathbreaking and far-sighted “economic reappraisal” of the period 1081–1204, using the evidence of archaeology and imperial coinage to demonstrate the urban expansion and the “apogee of the Byzantine mercantile development.”⁹

The five-year assistant curatorship in the Fitzwilliam Museum (1967 to 1972) that Grierson had secured for Michael Hendy was very productive. He wrote several publications on numismatic topics, most notably the series of articles that appeared between 1970 and 1972 tracing the relationship between the patterns of coin production and fiscal administration. As he himself recalled in the introduction to his volume of collected articles in the *Variorum* series (1989): “Cambridge (the elder) . . . was an interesting place for an historian/numismatist concentrating on the late Antique and Byzantine worlds to be. It was, after all, the Cambridge of Hugo Jones, Moses Finley, and Philip Grierson, among others. (To the last of these in particular . . . I think my scholarly and intellectual debt is obvious, and is most readily acknowledged.)”¹⁰ In 1972 he was appointed lecturer in numismatics and curator of the coin collection at the Barber Institute of the University of Birmingham. In 1978, he left the curatorship of the coin collection for the position of lecturer in numismatics at the Department of Medieval History, a no less “interesting place” to teach, with colleagues such as Chris Wickham, John Haldon, Wendy Davies, and last but not least Margaret Alexiou, with whom he was to share the best years of the rest of his life. He encouraged and directed the work of one of his students, Alan Harvey, who followed up on his teacher’s reassessment of the eleventh- and twelfth-century economy to write

6 Nicetas Choniates, *Historia*, ed. J. A. van Dieten (Berlin, 1975), 648–50.

7 M. F. Hendy, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, 4.1:61. The debate culminated in the controversial review of *DOC*, vol. 4 by I. Touratsoglou in *Revue numismatique* 158 (2002): 385–404—with references to previous literature—to which Hendy declined to reply because he considered the review, though apparently scholarly in content, “a vituperative and malevolent rant” employing “intemperate terms.”

8 “De l’unité à l’éclatement: La monnaie et son usage dans l’Empire byzantin (1081–1261)” (PhD diss., Université de Paris, 2007).

9 “Byzantium 1081–1204: An Economic Reappraisal,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 20 (1970): 31–52, repr. in *The Economy, Fiscal Administration and Coinage of Byzantium* (Northampton, 1989), art. no. II.

10 M. Hendy, *Economy*, x.

his dissertation, published as *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire, 900–1200* (Cambridge, 1989).

Most important, in these years Hendy wrote his second magnum opus, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy, c. 300–1450* (1985). He carried out the research for this volume on both sides of the Atlantic, since he was a visiting fellow at Dumbarton Oaks in 1976 and returned occasionally in the 1980s, since Giles Constable appointed him associate advisor for Byzantine numismatics there in 1980–1981 and 1982–1984.¹¹ Upon its appearance this massive learned work received universal acclaim and three decades later remains an indispensable work of reference.¹² Originally intended as a history of Byzantine coinage (money, its production and circulation, and the administration of mints), with extensive citation of primary sources, it was enlarged to assess the role of money in the economy, and it included a long geographical section with a valuable comparison between the Balkans and Asia Minor.¹³ Under the influence of the Cambridge school, Hendy contended that the primary dynamic of coin production was the needs of the state, and that trade played no part at all in the state's monetary policy and a limited one in monetary distribution and circulation. Whereas the first proposition can hardly be disputed, the second, from the start, was questioned. Indeed, the development of archaeology has shown in fact the greater monetization of Byzantium in its most affluent periods. Hendy's systematic downgrading of the role of cash in the Byzantine economy, a paradox, considering the title of his book, led to such affirmations as that "at this most basic level, the late Roman and Byzantine

economy may well have been less monetized than, say, the Anglo-Saxon economy, and was almost certainly less so than the late Saxon, or Norman one."¹⁴ This approach did not, however, detract from the immense merit of the book and its contribution to essential aspects of the "monetary economy": the budget, the administrative basis of coinage and its supervision, the problem of transport and trade.

When Hendy found the University of Birmingham policy on promotions professionally discouraging, he chose to take voluntary severance in 1987,¹⁵ and moved to the United States, following Meg Alexiou, who had been appointed George Seferis Professor of Modern Greek Studies at Harvard. In 1987/88 he held an Alpha Fund fellowship at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton. There he wrote three new articles, which he included in his *Variorum* volume (1989). Then he joined Harvard University's Department of Classics as an Andrew W. Mellon fellow. Despite his credentials,¹⁶ enhanced by his important fieldwork on coin finds from the excavations at Aphrodisias, Saraçhane (St. Polyeuktos) and Kalenderhane in Istanbul, and Kourion in Cyprus (the last three projects supported by Dumbarton Oaks), this honorary position was unfortunately never replaced by a more permanent one in this country.

In 1993, thanks to then-Director of Byzantine Studies Henry Maguire, Hendy agreed to return to Dumbarton Oaks as resident researcher on Byzantine coins for six months, to complete volume four of the *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection (1081–1261)* (= *DOC*). He had already done the cataloguing in 1966 and even prepared the plates, a few copies of which were actually printed at some point before 1984.¹⁷ As Grierson explains, however, instead of following the simple format of *DOC* volume one, "it was [then, i.e., in 1967] thought best to continue with the plan of *DOC* II and III, with a substantial introduction by Hendy himself," though *Coinage*

11 Participating for instance in the 1985 Dumbarton Oaks spring symposium with "The Barbarian Coinages as a Mirror of the Disintegration of Late Roman Structures." His paper, however, did not appear with the others in the volume edited by Evangelos Chrysos, *Das Reich und die Barbaren* (Vienna, 1989), but in *Viator* as "From Public to Private: The Western Barbarian Coinage as a Mirror of the Disintegration of Late Roman State Structures," *Viator, Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 19 (1988): 29–78.

12 See inter alia the reviews by D. Abulafia, *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 40 (1987): 151–52; C. Foss, *Speculum* 64 (1989): 966–69; P. Grierson, *Antiquaries Journal* 66 (1986): 178; A. Laiou, *American Historical Review* 94 (1989): 119–20; F. Millar, *JRS* 78 (1988): 198–202; C. Morrisson, *Revue numismatique*, 6th ser., 29 (1987): 245–56.

13 This seemed to Paul Lemerle so extraneous to the work that he refused to accept the manuscript in the series *Monographies de Travaux et Mémoires*, as I had suggested to him, unless the chapter was removed, a proposal that Hendy absolutely opposed. The same comment had been made by one referee for Cambridge, but the press was clever enough to take the book as it was.

14 *Studies* (n. 2 above), 301.

15 In *The Times*, 13 June 2008, his former colleague in Birmingham, John Ray, commenting on the obituary published on 12 June, wrote, "he could never quite forgive an institution for the fact that it employed him, and it was inevitable that his career took a different turn from those of most academics. But he was a generous and exceptional colleague."

16 He had been awarded a Litt. D. (Cantab.) in 1989.

17 These were used for the final publication, which explains the gaps in illustration of recent coins, lamented by several reviews.

and Money could well have served this purpose.¹⁸ The full typescript, with a two-hundred-page introduction and detailed comments on the various reigns, was delivered in 1994 after a “six-months’ burst of frenetic activity in 1993 and an even briefer six-weeks’ final coda in 1994,”¹⁹ but it was not published until 1999. Its hasty completion meant that it was almost impossible for Hendy to provide, as he had done in his 1969 book or as Grierson had attempted in *DOC* two and three, a full description of all known types of the coinage, given the amount of new material that had turned up over the years—and is still turning up nowadays. But it included a detailed analysis of the complex historical background of the period, and a fundamental study of imperial ceremonial costume and regalia. Moreover, besides reassessing and updating his earlier discoveries,²⁰ Hendy proposed two thought-provoking new hypotheses, one on the contemporaneous existence of two mints at Constantinople and another on the importance of the fifteen-year indiction cycle in the changing designs of the twelfth-century coinage.

In 1994, since he had not been offered any suitable position in the United States,²¹ he went back to the land and landscape of his youth and settled at Walmer in Kent. There he moved on to other passions and, in *Candide*’s words, to “cultiver son jardin,”²² in all meanings. Not only did he plant roses and clematis; grow peas, rhubarb, raspberries, gooseberries, blackcurrants and the like; and transform his fruit crop into elaborate marmalades; but he loved wildlife and delighted in the frogs and their tadpoles in his pool. He took pride that “it will never be

a *tidy* garden as we would not want it to be so: more order in disorder.”²³ He would also walk the North Downs near his home, searching for prehistoric flints and hand axes. There too, his love of life, his sense of fun and laughter, his knowledge of food and wine (and most things French) made his company appreciated by many friends as it had been by former colleagues, as, among many, Jean-Michel Spieser, who resided in the Fellows Building with him in 1993, vividly remembers.

Living in Walmer in the historical Wellesley House, the former residence of the Duke of Wellington, he decorated the rooms in Regency style and filled them with the Nelson and Wellington memorabilia that he had begun to collect. In this environment his academic interests were transferred to more recent times and he began transcribing the letterbook of Richard Budd Vincent, captain of *HMS Arrow*, who took part in the wars against Napoleon and was buried in a vault beneath the nave of the Norman church in Walmer. He maintained a particular affinity for this church: his funeral service took place here on May 29, 2008, the same place where his marriage with Professor Margaret Alexiou had been celebrated in 2004 on the anniversary of the battle of Waterloo. Destined for the Naval Records, this last opus will be edited and published posthumously by his wife and his brother, John. With the exception of this last project, Hendy had seen all his scholarly production in print by the time of his death.²⁴ His great books and articles all bear witness to the quality of his scholarship and the originality of his mind: ἐργον εἰς αἰ.

Cécile Morrisson

18 Philip Grierson’s memoirs on Dumbarton Oaks, preserved in the archives at Dumbarton Oaks.

19 *DOC* 4.1:viii.

20 Defending them harshly against the major criticisms they had received (see “Excursus on the Problem of Clipped Trachea, Bulgarian and Latin Imitative Trachea, and the Chronology of Main Issues in the Years ± 1204,” *DOC* 4.1:59–95).

21 As Meg Alexiou and John Hendy have written, “He was well known amongst his peers and colleagues for his occasional difficult and contrary manner and put this down to the county of his birth and the old maxim ‘Sussex won’t be druv.’”

22 Voltaire, *Candide ou l’optimiste*, chap. xxx, 1759.

23 Letter to Cécile Morrisson, from Walmer, 4 April 1997.

24 But he was planning to write a book on the Byzantine economy aimed at a wider public. His joint work with Meg Alexiou on the Ptochoprodromika nears completion.